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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0997  
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0001

UNCLAS BELMOPAN 000008

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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN - ROIS BEAL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BH](#)

SUBJECT: BELIZE: GENERAL ELECTIONS FEBRUARY 7

¶1. After months of rumors and speculation, Prime Minister Musa announced the day of general elections in Belize: Thursday, February 7, 2008. He also announced that a referendum regarding an elected Senate will take place on the same day.

¶2. Announcement of the election date was to some extent a formality. Both main parties, as well as some smaller ones, have been putting up campaign signs and taking out political ads for months. In the last House meeting, Musa's People's United Party (PUP) passed a motion to have an elected Senate referendum, a move generally viewed as an election maneuver allowing the PUP to state publicly that they are trying to give more power to the people.

¶3. In addition, the party has announced pay increases for teachers, police and the Belize Defence Force. The government also received a long-pending US\$10 million loan from Venezuela to be used for housing grants for lower income families. A crowd formed at the Housing Department to apply for the grants. Also, multiple land grants have been awarded to individuals and corporations at seemingly undervalued property prices. Road and other infrastructure improvements continue as well.

¶4. The opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), led by Dean Barrow, will run on a "reform agenda," reminding voters of the financial scandals, corruption and cronyism of the Musa years as well as promising changes to prevent such abuse in the future. The morning after the election call, Barrow unveiled his party's platform, a document filled with populist ideas like lowering electricity costs, providing subsidies for students and cutting taxes. We expect the campaign to focus on domestic issues, with one exception: the government's handling of the resettlement of a small village of Guatemalans who had established themselves on the Belize side of the disputed border

¶5. While the mood in the country seems to favor a change of government, no one thinks the PUP will go down easily after 10 years in office. The party is well-organized and financed and can count on a hard core of supporters who will push to get out the vote. Whether the UDP or the PUP wins, we do not foresee major changes in bilateral relations or foreign policy.

DIETER